

DUTY OF ABOLITIONISTS

TO

PRO-SLAVERY MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

The following is the substance of a letter of *excommunication* to the church of which I was a member—so far as it related to slavery.—I could no longer hold *christian* fellowship, directly or indirectly, with men-stealers.

To the First Church in Newbury, Mass.

Dear Brethren and Sisters—I feel bound in duty to God and the oppressed to make to you the following communication.

American Slavery is composed of the following crimes as essential elements of existence, i. e. *Robbery, Concubinage, Manstealing and Murder*. Three million of our brethren and sisters are now living in our midst under the following circumstances. Husbands and wives, parents and children, are torn asunder to pamper the lust of pleasure and of gain. Eighty thousand children are annually stolen before your eyes—labeled as goods and reared for the market. One-sixth of the parents of this nation are counted as felons and punished with stripes, imprisonment, or *death*, for teaching their children to read the Bible. One-sixth of our population are compelled to live in ignorance and heathenism in this land of schools, bibles, churches, and ministers. Husbands are compelled to see their wives, and wives their husbands, parents their children, and children their parents, placed on the auctioneer's bench and sold to the highest bidder. The family institution is abrogated—the strongest ties of nature broken—the dearest affections of the heart crushed—and millions are living in open adultery and concubinage in your

presence. You see it and you know it. By your government and laws, and your connivance, they are incapacitated to make contracts—to bear witness—to own property—to contract marriage—to educate their offspring—to choose employments, or to change their condition.—**SLAVES THEY ARE BORN, AND SLAVES THEY MUST DIE**—and that, by the behest of a government of which you profess to be a part. The right of personal ownership is denied to them. The image of the Deity is bought and sold at your doors. Human beings, for whom Jesus died, are reared for your markets and made staple articles of trade. **FATHERS SELL THEIR OWN CHILDREN.**

All these abominations are constantly and systematically committed before your eyes. You see them and know them, and have long seen them and known them. Yet as a *church*, you have never said one word against them. You have never opened your mouth to speak for the dumb—to plead the cause of the heart-stricken slave, and to rebuke the oppressor. On the contrary, as a *church*, you have by refusing to hear and aid those who plead the cause of the slave—by your opposition to abolition, and by silence respecting the wrongs of the oppressed and the guilt of the oppressor—taken sides with man-stealers. You have shown a willingness to receive to your pulpit and communion, as christians and christian ministers, those who live by robbery, and to *persevere* in holding *christian fellowship* with slaveholders who are guilty of the foulest crimes that ever polluted humanity.—Thus you have given the most efficient support to slavery and to all the crimes of which it is composed.

Duty to God, to the *christian* church, to the slaves, to yourselves, and to mankind—demands of me that I should cease to do any thing that tends to throw the sanctions of christianity around slavery. By recognizing or supporting any man or woman, or any *body* of men and women, as a christian minister, or a christian church, that fellowship menstealers, as *christians*, I do say to slaveholders your crimes are consistent with christian character, and I do encourage theft, robbery, concubinage and murder. I say to them that manstealing is no bar to christian fellowship and consistent with christian character.

I am deeply and sorrowfully impressed with the belief that by your opposition to the Anti-Slavery enterprise, and by your silence in regard to the wrongs of the slave and the guilt of the slaveholder, you, as a church, are doing more to make our holy religion the scorn and execration of mankind than all that Jew, or Heathen, or Infidel, ever did or can do. While you thus continue by your silence or otherwise to sustain this system of wrong and outrage—I cannot regard you as a christian church: and I DO HEREBY RENOUNCE YOU AS A CHRISTIAN CHURCH. This resolution is formed in view of that day when I am to meet the imbruted slave and his guilty oppressors and their abettors before Heaven's tribunal. It is deliberately formed and never will be retracted till, as a *church*, you have humbled yourselves before God and the slave, repented and made restitution by bearing an open and consistent testimony against slavery.

I am pained to be obliged to take this step, and can but weep over the necessity that forces me

to take it. But I am determined to clear myself from all known participation in the wrongs inflicted on my brothers and sisters in bonds. The God of the oppressed calls me to it, and I dare not disobey. At his bidding I have done it—not counting my reputation, or my warmest earthly friends, dear to me that I may please my heavenly Father and remember those in bonds as bound with them. I feel no solicitude about consequences to myself. *Duty is mine, consequences God's.* I believe God is with me in thus refusing to regard you as a *christian church*, while, by silence or otherwise, you countenance slavery. I leave myself and my reputation in his hands, praying that I may be found faithful in every good word and work, and always bear about in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in my mortal body.

Yours for God and the oppressed,

H. C. WRIGHT.

Boston, Sept. 25, 1840.

The same, in substance, I sent to the Association to which I belonged, the ESSEX NORTH—refusing longer to recognize them as a *christian* association for their participation in slavery and war.

From the church I have received the following—"Whereas brother Henry C. Wright has, in a letter addressed to the Essex North Association, as also in a letter addressed to this church, charged upon the association in general and this church in particular, together with our pastor, the *sin* of apologizing for and countenancing Slavery and War; and whereas he defines such apology and countenance to consist simply in the *silence of the church* upon these subjects:

and whereas brother Wright denies to us the character of a christian church for *such silence*, as a church, and *withdraws his fellowship* from us for *this cause*—therefore

Resolved, That the withdrawal of brother Henry C. Wright be confirmed by this church; and that so long as he shall sustain *the* charges, upon *this ground* alone, and maintain his present views of church fellowship with us, so long his connection with us must be suspended.

Passed in the affirmative.

In behalf of the church—a true copy—

EZRA HALE, Clerk.

From the Clerical Association I received the following :—

"Voted, That this Association withdraw from Rev. H. C. Wright, as a member walking contrary to our rules.

D. T. KIMBALL."

☞ IT IS THE RIGHT AND DUTY OF AN INDIVIDUAL TO EXCOMMUNICATE THE CHURCH, AS MUCH AS IT IS THE RIGHT AND DUTY OF THE CHURCH TO EXCOMMUNICATE AN INDIVIDUAL.—

Suppose the First Church in Newbury to consist of 100 members. Had I accorded christian fellowship to men-stealers, it would have been the right and duty of the ninety and nine to excommunicate me. So if the ninety and nine countenance robbery and concubinage by holding christian fellowship with men-stealers, it is my right and duty to excommunicate them.—

CHRISTIANITY GOES NOT BY MAJORITIES, BUT, BY PURITY AND TRUTH. One may deny to thousands the name of Christian, as well as thousands to one. Abolitionists owe it as a duty to God and man to act on this principle, and forthwith cease to recognize that organization as a

Christian church, that opposes the Anti-Slavery enterprise and countenances slavery.

For taking this step with regard to the Ministerial Association and the church to which I belonged—for refusing to sustain a pro-slavery church and ministry as a *christian* church and ministry, the orthodox clergy of New-England are determined to thrust me from their pulpits. They are determined to compel abolitionists to support men and women, as christian ministers and churches, who hold christian fellowship with men-stealers—or brand them with infamy for their refusal. The issue is made up. Ministers have settled it, that pro-slavery ministers and churches shall be sustained, and that those who refuse to sustain them shall be outlawed.

The contest between the principles of liberty, justice and humanity, and existing clerical and church organizations,—is growing warmer and hotter. It is but just begun. It will be a desperate struggle. For these organizations will hold on to their despotism over the individual with a death-grasp. They claim to control the conscience, reason, speech and actions of their individual members, especially of the WOMEN. The individual members dare not speak and act for crushed humanity as conscience dictates, till they learn the course to be pursued by the organization ; and the organization is invariably directed by a few that have riches or political influence—never by the poor, meek, whole-hearted, self-sacrificing disciples of Jesus that may happen to belong to it. It is certain that these clerical and church sectarian organizations, as such, are now among the deadliest enemies to the cause of Human Rights, to Abolition, Peace, and to all moral reforms. They are hostile to

christianity, as organizations. The very hiding place of Slavery, War, and Sectarianism, and a mill-stone about the neck of our holy religion. The *humanity* of the Seminole savage would sooner abolish slavery and do more to soothe and comfort the scarred and bruised heart of the slave, than the *religion* of our ministerial and church organizations. To escape the wrongs and outrages heaped upon him by the ministers and churches of this country, the slave flies to the swamps and everglades of Florida, and seeks protection from the injustice and scourges of professed christian ministers and churches, under the humanity of savages. I would as quick cast a new-born *babe* into a snow bank, as to put a new-born child of God into any of the existing church organizations. There is no more warmth, tenderness, and cherishing and sustaining love in the one than in the other. These church organizations, being filled with slavery, war and sectarianism, are as chilling and benumbing to the soul that is glowing with love to God and man, as a snow bank would be to the tender babe. They have no soul, no conscience, no humanity. The sweet, forgiving and gentle spirit of Jesus, is not in them, any more than in the political parties of the day.—They love not the slave. Like Priest and Levite—cold and inhuman—they pass by on the other side. There are those in them that are devoted christians—but they are *not under their influence*. But to come under their influence and be governed by them is death to the life of God in the soul. It turns the loving, forgiving and kindly affectioned heart within, to adamant. Steels it against the sufferings of the despised, the sorrowing and imbruted slave.

Simply and solely for refusing to recognize such ministers and churches as christian ministers and churches—I have already been excluded from many pulpits in New-England within 18 months, and hundreds of ministers have determined that I shall not enter their pulpits, if they can help it, till I go and make confession to a pro-slavery association and church, that I have presumed to disown, or excommunicate. I have the names of many men and women, who were members of Congregational and Presbyterian churches, who have been excommunicated, *solely* because they refused to pay *one cent* to support ministers who hold *christian* fellowship with men-stealers. Thus the terrors of excommunication—the spiritual thunderbolts of pro-slavery ministers and churches—are held over the heads of abolitionists, to compel them into christian fellowship with thieves and robbers.

But humanity and conscience, in the hearts of thousands have gained the victory over the terrors of excommunication from men-stealers and men-killing churches. They are determined to lay their all on the altar of humanity, and say “where the slave goes we go, his portion shall be our portion, his sorrows, tears, and stripes, shall be ours, and his God our God.”—This is now the great test question among abolitionists—*Will you disown as christian ministers and churches, those who oppose abolition or who countenance slavery by silence or otherwise?* Abolitionists are now in this fiery ordeal. There are thousands that will stand the test, and come forth from the furnace untouched by the flames.

H. C. WRIGHT.

Peterborough, N. H., Jan'y 21, 1841.

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